

CHAPTER 44

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 44

This chapter treats of the eastern gate of the temple being appropriated to the use of the prince, (^{<340>}Ezekiel 44:1-3), of the sin of the Lord's people, in admitting strangers and unholy persons into the sanctuary, either to officiate or communicate there, (^{<340>}Ezekiel 44:4-9) of the degrading of the Levites, that went astray, assigning them inferior posts and service in the house of God, (^{<340>}Ezekiel 44:10-14) and of the establishment of the sons of Zadok in their ministry, who were faithful, (^{<345>}Ezekiel 44:15,16), then follow various laws relating to their garments; shaving of their heads; drinking wine; their marriage; performance of their ministerial work; their regard to the dead, and their food and maintenance, (^{<347>}Ezekiel 44:17-31).

Ver. 1. *Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary, &c.*] The prophet was brought by his divine guide, from the altar of burnt offerings, which stood before the house, where he had given him the dimensions of it, and the ordinances concerning it, to the temple or holy place, called the outward sanctuary, in distinction from the inward sanctuary, or holy of holies; and to one of the gates of it, which was a gate of the inner court:

and which looketh toward the east: the eastern gate, and was the same he had been at before, and therefore is said to be brought back the way of it; (see ^{<340>}Ezekiel 43:1):

and it was shut; when he was there before, it was open; for he saw the glory of the Lord enter into the house by the way of it; but now it was shut, and for that reason, because he had entered into it; signifying, among other things, that he would never return, or remove from thence any more. The Misnic doctors^{f768} interpret this of one of the little doors to the great gate of the temple, that had two little doors, one in the north, the other in the south; that which was in the south no man ever entered in by, and this they say is understood here; but it is not a little door, but a gate here spoken of, and that the eastern one; of which more in the following verses.

Ver. 2. *Then said the Lord unto me, this gate shall be shut, &c.]* In time to come, as Jarchi interprets it, in the latter day; it was shut, and it should continue to be shut:

it shall not be opened; any more; though it has been, yet hereafter no more:

and no man shall enter in by it, into the house of the Lord,

because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it; the same with the glory of the God of Israel, (³⁶⁰Ezekiel 43:2,4,5):

therefore it shall be shut; no one being to enter after him. Various are the sentiments of expositors concerning this gate. Some of the ancients have interpreted it of the Virgin Mary, by whom Christ came into this world in human nature, being born of her, a virgin, who had never known man, and as is thought never did after the birth of Christ; nor were any afterwards born of her; no man might come into the world by her, by that self-same way the incarnate God did, and for that reason. This sense is approved of, not only by Papists, but by many Protestant writers. Others understand it of the Scriptures, the word of God, which as it is a sealed book to men learned and unlearned, so a gate shut up; it cannot be opened by a mere natural man, or be understood by the light of nature; none can open it but the Lion of the tribe of Judah; who gives the spiritual knowledge of it to whom he pleases, the perfect knowledge of which is reserved to a future state; and there are some things in it which will be always shut, and ever secrets; as the modus of the subsistence of the three Persons in the Godhead; the generation of the Son, the procession of the Spirit, and the union of the two natures in Christ; (see ²³⁹Isaiah 29:11,12 ⁴⁶⁸Revelation 5:1-5 ⁴⁹³John 3:13), others think that the gate of heaven, or the way to eternal glory and happiness, is meant; which was shut by the sin of man, and could never be opened again by any mere man; but Christ by his blood has opened the way into it; and has entered into it, not as a private, but public person, representing all his people; and none but those that belong to him, that are members of him, shall enter there; as none but Christ personal, so none but Christ mystical: but I am rather of opinion, since this whole fabric, as we have seen, is an emblem of the church of Christ on earth in the latter day, the way into that is designed here; and its being shut signifies, that, as the church is a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, and is only for the use of Christ, and should be a chaste virgin to him, he should have all her heart, affection, and faith; so it should not be pervious unto others; no natural or unregenerate man should enter into it; and when the

Lord shall have taken up his residence in the church in the latter day, in a more spiritual and glorious manner than ever, there shall no more come into her the uncircumcised and the unclean, (^{<2510>}Isaiah 52:1), and especially in the New Jerusalem state nothing shall enter that defiles, or makes an abomination, or a lie, (^{<627>}Revelation 21:27) none but those that are Christ's, that are true members of his, and one with him; and this sense agrees with what follows in this chapter, and receives light and confirmation thereby; in which the Lord complains of the Israel and church of God in these its present declining times, that unregenerate persons were admitted into the sanctuary of the Lord, to communicate with the saints, and officiate there, (^{<2407>}Ezekiel 44:7-9) and commends such who are faithful ministers and members, who are established therein, (^{<26415>}Ezekiel 44:15,16).

Ver. 3. *It is for the prince: the prince shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord, &c.]* Or, "as for the prince, the prince shall sit in it"^{>f769}; in the gate which is shut to others: not the high priest, as Jarchi, though he might have a particular seat in the temple, as Eli had in the tabernacle, (^{<1009>}1 Samuel 1:9), where he might eat the bread and flesh of holy things: nor the political prince, the king of Israel, though he might have a place in the temple peculiar to himself; (see ^{<1462>}2 Chronicles 6:12,13 23:13) (^{<1408>}2 Chronicles 24:31), and the Jews say only the kings of the house of David were allowed to sit in the sanctuary: but the King Messiah, as Kimchi and Ben Melech rightly interpret it, is here meant; who before, in this prophecy, is called David a Prince, (^{<2624>}Ezekiel 34:24 37:25), he who is the Prince of peace; Michael the great Prince; the Prince of life, and the Prince of the kings of the earth; the Messiah the Prince. Such who interpret the gate of the gate of heaven understand this of Christ's sitting down there at his Father's right hand, on the same throne with him, having done his work, and being at ease, and in honour; and of his enjoyment of glory there, as the heavenly glory is sometimes signified by a feast, by sitting down at a table, and eating bread in the kingdom of God, (^{<1081>}Matthew 8:11 ^{<2415>}Luke 14:15 22:30), and so it may intend his being in the presence of God with the utmost delight and joy; having that glory he had with him before the world was, and all power in heaven and in earth; dispensing gifts and grace to men, and receiving honour and glory from them, and seeing the travail of his soul with satisfaction: but why may it not be understood, more consistent with the scope of the vision, of his sitting in his church, at his table there with his saints, eating with them, and they with him, in his word

and ordinances before the Lord? see (^{201D}Song of Solomon 1:12 4:16 5:1
^{488D}Revelation 3:20),

he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same; which some explain of Christ's ascension to heaven, and descent from thence in the same way; he went up to heaven in the eastern part of the world, from the mount of Olives, to the east of Jerusalem; and in like manner shall he descend, and his feet shall stand on that mount, (^{401E}Acts 1:11,12 ^{384D}Zechariah 14:4), but it may be interpreted of his going in and out of his church at his will and pleasure; and affording his gracious presence and fellowship with himself in his house and ordinances,

Ver. 4. *Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house,* &c.] The north gate of the inward court, whither he was brought from the east gate, which was shut: this, and what follow, may have some respect to the churches in these our northern parts of the world, in their now declining circumstances, which are aptly represented in some following verses; but will hereafter be filled with the glory of the Lord, as follows:

and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord; as he had seen at the eastern gate, (^{368D}Ezekiel 43:2,4,5):

and I fell upon my face; as he had done before, under a sense of the greatness and glory of the divine Majesty, and of his own vileness and unworthiness; (see ^{368B}Ezekiel 43:3).

Ver. 5. *And the Lord said unto me, son of man,* &c.] This is still the voice of the Lord speaking out of the house to the prophet, (^{368B}Ezekiel 43:6):

mark well; or, "set thine heart"⁷⁷⁰; be attentive to what is about to be said, as being of great concern and importance:

and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee; heart, eyes, and ears, are all to be employed in the most diligent manner in regarding the things hereafter delivered; the same expressions exciting attention were used at the first of this vision, (^{340E}Ezekiel 40:4): concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Lord, and all the laws thereof; (see Gill on "^{368B}Ezekiel 43:11"),

mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary; the way of entrance into the Gospel church, and the manner of exclusion from it, and the laws and rules concerning these; the prophet is

bid particularly to observe these well, because it was in these things God's professing people chiefly offended, as appears by what follows; they were not so careful as they should have been in the admission of persons among them, or in the exclusion of delinquents.

Ver. 6. *And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel,* &c.] This is a character of literal Israel from the beginning, (~~REB~~ Deuteronomy 9:24), and frequently given it in this prophecy, (~~REB~~ Ezekiel 2:2,3,5-8) (~~REB~~ Ezekiel 3:9,26,27) and well agrees with these declining churches in the latter day, and even in our times; it represents them as rebellious, because of their disregard to the ordinances of God's house, and to the laws and rules of it; and are not only called "rebellious", but "rebellion"^{f771} itself; expressive of the greatness of their sin, and the aggravations of it:

thus saith the Lord God, O ye house of Israel, let it suite you of all your abominations; that is, let the abominations you have committed, will worship and superstition, paying a regard to the doctrines and commandments of men, be sufficient; stop and proceed no further; relinquish those things which are so abominable in my sight; let the time past suffice to have wrought them; cease entirely from them; (see ~~REB~~ 1 Peter 4:3), these abominations are more particularly expressed in the following words.

Ver. 7. *In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers,* &c.] Unregenerate men, who are in a state of alienation and estrangement to divine and spiritual things: strangers to God; to the true knowledge of him in Christ; to the fear and love of God; to the true grace of God in conversion; and to communion with him: strangers to Christ, to his person and offices; to the way of peace, life, and salvation by him; to his righteousness; to faith in him, love of him, and fellowship with him: strangers to the Spirit; to his person, to regeneration and sanctification by him; to the graces of the Spirit, faith, hope, love, humility, self-denial, &c.; to the things of the Spirit, which they neither know nor savour; and to the several offices he performs, as a comforter, the Spirit of adoption, an earnest and sealer: strangers to their own hearts, and the plague of them, and sin that dwells in them: strangers to the nature of sin, and the exceeding sinfulness of it; to the deceitfulness of sin, and the consequences of it; to true repentance for it, and to the right way of atonement of it, by

the blood of Christ: strangers to the Gospel of Christ, and the truths of it; and to the saints and people of God:

and uncircumcised in heart; who never were pricked in the heart for sin, or felt any pain there on account of it; never had the hardness of their heart removed, or the impurity of it discovered to them; never were filled with shame and loathing because of it; or ever put off the body of sins in a course of conversation; or renounced their own righteousness:

and uncircumcised in flesh; carnal, as they were born; men in the flesh, in a state of nature, mind and savour the things of the flesh, and do the works of it; having never been taught by the grace of God to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to abstain from fleshly ones: or, who put their trust in the flesh, in outward things, in carnal privileges, and external righteousness: these the Lord complains were brought

to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house: either to be members here, and partake of all the ordinances and privileges of the Lord's house; or to officiate here as priests and ministers of the Lord:

when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood; which, under the law, were the Lord's; and here signify the ministry of the word and ordinances, the goodness and fatness of the Lord's house; and especially the ordinance of the Lord's supper, that feast of fat things; in which Christ, the true and living bread of God, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed, is represented to the faith of God's people:

and they have broken my covenant, because of all your abominations: that is, have broken the rule of the divine word and everlasting Gospel by such abominations; by admitting such ministers and members, the one to administer, the other to partake of, Gospel ordinances: this is the true state of the case of most of the reformed churches in our days; it is to be feared that there are multitudes of unregenerate ministers in them; that they are full of carnal professors; and notorious it is that the ordinance of the Lord's supper is prostituted to wicked persons, and to answer ends it never was designed for; which must be an abomination to the Lord.

Ver. 8. *And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things, &c.*] That is, have not kept and retained the holy doctrines of the Gospel; nor observed the holy ordinances of it, as they were first delivered:

but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves; meaning either, that such as were in public office did not attend to it; but were idol shepherds, and left the flock, their care and charge, to others, to surrogates and curates, to do their work for them; while they indulged themselves in sloth and idleness: or that the members and hearers set up preachers for themselves, according to their lusts, agreeable to their own carnal sentiments, without any regard to the will and glory of God.

Ver. 9. *Thus saith the Lord God,* &c.] This that follows is the law and rule to be observed, and which will be observed by the churches in the latter day, though so little regarded now:

no stranger uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary; of these (see Gill on “²⁶⁴⁷Ezekiel 44:7”) unregenerate men may not be admitted members of a Gospel church; for that is holy, and holiness becomes it; but they are unholy, and as unfit to be received as swine into a king’s palace; saints and they cannot talk together, their language being different, they are barbarians to one another; nor can they walk together, being not agreed in sentiment and practice; besides, such persons disquiet the churches of Christ by their quarrelsome behaviour in it, and immoral conversation out of it; and are dangerous and infectious persons, whether heterodox in principle, or immoral in life: and much less should such be admitted to public service, to preach the word, and administer ordinances; since they should be holy that bear the vessels of the Lord, his name, and Gospel; they are blind and ignorant, and so not apt and fit to teach others; they are dumb, and cannot speak to cases they are strangers to, as those of wounded consciences, tempted and deserted, or backslidden ones; they will bring in strange doctrines, foreign to the Scriptures, and the experience of saints; and it is no wonder they are unsuccessful in their ministry, and churches do not thrive under them; to which, among other things, we must impute the great decline of religion, even among Protestant dissenters, who, it is to be feared, have too many of this character among them: but there should not be here

of any stranger that is among the children of Israel; though they are among them, nay, though they are the children of them, and have had a religious education; yet being strangers to the grace of God, should not be admitted members, and much less ministers, of the churches of Christ.

Ver. 10. *And the Levites that are gone away far from me,* &c.] These Levites were priests, as appears from (²⁶⁴⁸Ezekiel 44:13), who professed

themselves Gospel preachers, ministers of the reformed churches; but departed from the reformation principles; erred from the faith; and either mixed it with the doctrines of men, or wholly dropped, concealed, or dissembled it; departed from the word of God, as the rule of faith and practice; and set up their own reason as their guide in matters of religion; were gone off from the pure worship of God and his ordinances, and entirely neglected the discipline of his house:

when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; though there may be an allusion to some apostasy of literal Israel, under the Old Testament, and from whence language may be borrowed to express this; either to the Israelites joining themselves to Baalpeor in the fields of Moab, in the time of Phinehas, who was zealous and faithful to the Lord, from whom Zadok descended after mentioned: or to the defection in the times of Jeroboam and Rehoboam, when all Israel forsook the word of the Lord: or to the times of Ahaz, when Uriah the priest made an altar like to that at Damascus by the king's order; and which idolatrous practices increased in the times of Manasseh; when, no doubt, many of the priests and Levites, either through fear of kings, or on account of gain, and for the sake of their livelihood, departed from the Lord and his worship: but the reference is to a defection in the times of the New Testament, and in the latter days of those times; not to the falling away of the church of Rome, and its departure from the faith and order of the Gospel, predicted (² Thessalonians 2:3 ¹ Timothy 4:1-3 ² Timothy 3:1-5), though, no doubt, some truly godly ministers have been carried away with the errors of that church, and afterwards restored, as these Levites: but the case here referred to is the declension in the reformed churches; their formality; their great imperfection in the service of God; their departure from the doctrine of faith they once heard and received, which they are called upon to repent of; their defiling themselves with superstition and will worship, and going after the idols of their own hearts, corrupt reason, the doctrines and inventions of men, and carnal rites and ceremonies; (see ⁴ Revelation 3:1-4):

they shall even bear their iniquity; that is, the Levites, priests, or ministers; they shall bear the shame and disgrace, when they come to see their errors, and the punishment and chastisement of their sin, of which hereafter.

Ver. 11. *Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary,* &c.] Though degraded from their office as priests and ministers of the word, yet being

restored from their sins and errors, shall have a place in the house of God, and do their work there in a less honourable and a more servile way; as in former times, when ministers had sinned foully, and were degraded from their office, upon repentance they were not restored to that, but only admitted to lay communion; (see ^{<123B>}2 Kings 23:9):

having charge at the gates of the house; like those sort of Levites who were porters and doorkeepers in the temple, or like our sextons or pew openers now:

and ministering to the house; employed as the Gibeonites were in hewing wood and bringing water for the use of the sanctuary, or in repairing of it; learning and exercising the business of smiths, masons, and carpenters:

they shall slay the burnt offering, and the sacrifice for the people; not bring it to the altar, and offer it there; only slay it, and skin it for the priests; which is not to be understood literally, there being no such sacrifice in Gospel times; but to denote the menial service and inferior post that such shall be employed in; if they have no trade, they shall learn one, in order to get a livelihood for themselves, and be serviceable to the interest of religion in a lower way; but ministers of the word they shall not be:

and they shall stand before them to minister unto them; either before the priests, whose servants they shall be, or before the people; signifying that those that sin publicly shall be rebuked before all.

Ver. 12. *Because they ministered unto them before their idols, &c.*] Had officiated for them in the priest's office, their idols being in the courts of the Lord at the same time; or preached unto them false doctrines, such as are not agreeable to the word of God; and led them into superstition and will worship, and confirmed them therein:

and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity; or, "were for a stumbling block of iniquity"^{t772}; unto them the means of their stumbling and falling; by their ministrations, teaching them unsound doctrine; and by their practices and example, leading them into a way of false worship, and dissoluteness of life and conversation; who ought to have been examples to them in word and conversation, in faith and purity:

therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord; to smite and afflict them, and chastise them for the same; or, "upon them", or "concerning them"^{t773}; and so it may be expressive of an oath, of which

lifting up the hand is a sign; wherefore, that what the Lord had said of them might be believed and expected, he swears to it:

and they shall bear their iniquity; which is repeated for the confirmation and certainty of it; (see ³⁴⁴⁰Ezekiel 44:10), what is meant by it follows.

Ver. 13. *And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of priest unto me*, &c.] To bring the sacrifice to the altar, and offer it there; to sprinkle the blood, or burn the fat, or the incense; to intercede for the people, or bless them; (see ³⁰⁰⁶Hosea 4:6):

nor to come near to any of my holy things in the most holy place; to do any business, either in the holy or in the most holy place; to offer holy things, or eat of them. The sense is, that these degraded ministers, who had sinned so greatly, and had fallen so foully, though restored by repentance; yet should not preach the word, nor administer any ordinance:

but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed; that is, the shame of their abominations, of their abominable principles and practices, which they have held and maintained; being publicly disgraced and degraded, and so notoriously distinguished.

Ver. 14. *But I will make them keepers of the charge of the house*, &c.] To be watchmen or porters in it; to open and shut the doors of it; to sweep and keep it clean; to repair and mend it, and to do such like works, as it follows:

for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein; in a servile way; but not as priests or ministers of the word.

Ver. 15. *But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok*; &c.] The priests who were of the tribe of Levi, whom the Lord chose and separated, to minister to him, and so had a lawful call to this office, and were regularly invested with it; and design true and lawful, as well as faithful, ministers of the word; these are called the sons of Zadok, who descended from Eleazar the son of Aaron in the line of Phinehas, to whom the Lord promised the everlasting priesthood, and who was put into this office by Solomon in the room of Abiathar, (¹⁰²⁵1 Kings 2:35), his name signifies “righteous”, and was a type of Christ; who, as a divine Person, is essentially righteous; as man, truly and perfectly so; and, as Mediator, God’s righteous servant; and who, by his obedience and sufferings, is the author of righteousness to his people; who are his spiritual seed and offspring; children given him of his

Father; who have his sonship and adoption through him, and are born of him, his Spirit, and grace; and these are made righteous by him, through his righteousness imputed to them, and may be rightly called sons of Zadok: and this agrees with all the saints; and who, under the Gospel dispensation, are all priests, and offer up themselves, souls and bodies, and their spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, unto God by Christ; though all have not a right to preach the word, and administer ordinances, as ministers lawfully called have, and who seem to be more particularly designed here; and such as are regenerated persons, and justified by Christ's righteousness, and preach the doctrine of free justification by it, are the only fit persons for such an office:

that kept the charge of my sanctuary, when the children of Israel went astray from me; that kept and held fast the pure doctrines of the Gospel, committed as a sacred depositum to them, without mixture, and without wavering, with courage and valour; though a greater number were on the other side, and though they were reproached and persecuted for it; and who taught the people to keep the ordinances of the Gospel as they were first delivered, in faith and love, and without sinister ends, and so administered them themselves; and such faithful ministers and members of churches, especially in a time of great declension and general defection, God takes notice of, and has promised them great and good things; (see ~~(11)~~ Revelation 2:7,10,11,13,17,26-28 3:5,10-12,21,22 ~~(12)~~ Matthew 25:21)

they shall come near to me to minister unto me; in holy things to his people, which is called ministering unto him; as to pray to him for them; to preach to them in his name, and administer ordinances: all the saints indeed are priests, and may draw nigh to God through Christ; men are at a distance from him, through sin; there is no coming near to him but by Christ; and this coming near is not local, but spiritual, and includes all acts of worship, particularly prayer; and is a great favour and blessing:

and they shall stand before me, to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God; which, under the law, were both the Lord's; the one was burnt, and the other sprinkled, on divers things, and in various places: here it may respect the administration of the ordinance of the Lord's supper, that feast of fat things, and which may be eminently called the goodness and fatness of the house of God; and in which the blood of Christ is represented as shed for the remission of sins, and as spiritual drink

indeed to believers; and the sacrifice of Christ is commemorated, the feast being kept in remembrance of that.

Ver. 16. *They shall enter into my sanctuary, &c.*] Both to officiate, and to participate, which strangers and uncircumcised persons might not do, (^{<3440>}Ezekiel 44:9):

and they shall come near to my table to minister unto me; which some understand of the altar of burnt offering, which was as a table, and the sacrifice on it was the food of the Lord, (^{<3481>}Leviticus 3:11,16), others, the altar of incense; (see ^{<3442>}Ezekiel 41:22). Kimchi interprets it of the table of shewbread; but, whatever is meant in the letter, the mystical sense is, the ordinance of the Lord's supper, called the Lord's table, (^{<3401>}1 Corinthians 10:21), a table richly spread, and well furnished with spiritual provision: here Christ himself sits, bids his people welcome, eats with them, and they with him; and here all the saints are guests, and ministers in particular officiate:

and they shall keep my charge; continue to do so; for this they did before, (^{<3445>}Ezekiel 44:15), but now should be confirmed in their office, and never be displaced, as others; they that honour God he will honour, (^{<3423>}1 Samuel 2:30).

Ver. 17. *And it shall come to pass, that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, &c.*] The priests before described; when they enter the right way into a true Gospel church, consisting of such who are internally renewed, and have an inward work of grace upon their hearts, and are inward court worshippers; either as private Christians, to pray together, to praise the Lord, to hear his word, and sit down at his table; or as public ministers, to preach the Gospel, and administer ordinances:

they shall be clothed with linen garments; meaning not the outward conversation garments of the Lord's people; nor their inward garment of sanctification; but the robe of Christ's righteousness, and garments of salvation; that fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints; and which, though but one, serves for many; and answers not only all the purposes of a garment, but even of many, of change of raiment: like a garment, it is on, and not in, the saints; it is put upon them by imputation; and, like a garment, it covers them, protects them from all injuries, keeps them warm and comfortable, and beautifies and adorns them; and is compared to linen for its whiteness and purity; (see ^{<3488>}Revelation 3:18

19:8) and in this all the people of God, ministers and private Christians, perform all their services in the house of God; making mention of this, and of this only, whereby they become acceptable unto God, (^{<39716>}Psalm 71:16 ^{<4006>}Ephesians 1:6):

and no wool shall come upon them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within; it is certain that the priests under the law had wool upon them in the time of their ministry; for the purple, blue, and scarlet, as the Jewish writers ^{f774} observe, were all of them dyed wool; of which, with other things, the girdle common to all the priests, and the ephod and breast plate of the high priest, were made, (^{<0285>}Exodus 28:5,6,8,15), and which they wore in their common service: to the Jews in general it was not lawful to wear a garment of linen and woollen, (^{<0899>}Leviticus 19:19 ^{<0521>}Deuteronomy 22:11) and therefore, as Josephus says ^{f775}, to the priests only it was allowed to wear such a garment; and it is common with the Jewish doctors ^{f776} to observe, that

“the priests were not clothed to minister in the temple but with wool and linen;”

indeed, on the day of atonement, the high priest, when he went into the holiest of all, had only linen garments on him; and of the service of this day Jarchi interprets the text; but Kimchi rightly objects, that the holiest of all cannot be called a court; and besides, it is said in the plural number,

they shall be clothed, and minister; whereas only the high priest went into the most holy place; and therefore he truly observes, that this is a new thing to be done in future times: and this is true of the spiritual priesthood of saints and ministers of the Gospel, who are to have no wool upon them in their ministrations, whether in a more private or public way; who are, and should profess to be, justified by the righteousness of Christ only, without any works of their own to be joined with it; which to do is unnecessary, indecent, and dangerous: wool is observed to be the clothing of brute beasts, and therefore not a fit emblem of the clothing of saints; and likewise of such as are most slow, and sluggish, and inactive ^{f777}, and so an emblem of sloth; and which ought not to be in any of the people of God, and especially in ministers, who of all men should not be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. It may be further observed, that clothes made of wool are heavy, and render unfit for business, and cause sweat, which is offensive; and which seems to be a reason, (^{<2448>}Ezekiel 44:18), why wool should not be upon them, only linen garments wore by

them; that they might be more quick and expeditious in the dispatch of business, and avoid everything that gives offence, that the ministry may not be blamed: woollen clothes are also liable to moths, and worms, and to contract filth; and may signify that the priests of the Lord should be clear of carnal and sensual lusts; these should not be upon them, or they under the predominance of them, and particularly avarice; they should feed the flock, and not fleece it and clothe themselves with the wool of it, (^{254D}Ezekiel 34:2,3). The phrase, “and within”, or “in the house”, seems to denote some place distinct from the inner court, even the more inmost place of the temple, the holy of holies; which signifies heaven itself, into which only the high priest entered once a year, typical of Christ’s entering into heaven; and who has opened a way, and given all his people, who are priests unto God, boldness to enter there also by prayer, in the exercise of faith and hope; and which service they perform in the righteousness of Christ, and that only; (see ^{500B}Hebrews 9:8 10:19,20 6:20 ^{209B}Daniel 9:18).

Ver. 18. *And they shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, &c.]*

Denoting gravity and modesty, subjection to God, and authority among men under him; and also purity of doctrine, and clearness of light and knowledge:

and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; expressive of chastity; (see ^{128D}Exodus 28:40,42):

they shall not gird themselves with anything that causeth sweat; so not with wool, which is apt to cause sweat; and is thought to be the reason why it is forbidden in the preceding verse; and so this girdle must be different from the priest’s girdle under the law, for that had wool in it: sweat is of an ill smell, and very offensive; and may denote unsound doctrine and immorality in life and conversation, which give offence, and cause the ministry to be blamed, to which is opposed the girdle of truth and holiness, (^{406A}Ephesians 6:14). The Talmudic doctors interpret this of the place of girding, which is liable to sweat; and they say^{f778},

“they used not to gird neither below the loins, nor above the arm holes; but over against, or about the armholes;”

which is observed by Jarchi and Kimchi on the text; and the Targum is,

“they shall not gird upon or about the loins, but about the heart;”

that is, about the breast or paps; hence Christ our great High Priest is described as girt about the paps with a golden girdle, (⁶⁶¹³Revelation 1:13) so these are girt that are made priests by him; denoting their hearty zeal and affection for the truths of his Gospel, and the honour of his name, and their readiness to serve and glorify him: or,

they shall not gird themselves loosely^{f779}; in a negligent manner, which is both indecent, and hinders business.

Ver. 19. *And when they go forth into the utter court, &c.*] Out of the inner court where they minister, when they have done their service:

even into the utter court to the people; out of the church into the world, where the people are, doing their business, whether good men or bad:

they shall put off their garments wherein they ministered, and lay them in the holy chambers; the north and south chambers; (see Gill on "³⁶²³Ezekiel 42:13-14"):

and they shall put on other garments; which are their outward conversation garments, which are proper to appear in before men, for the honour of religion; though not sufficient to appear in before God, and render acceptable unto him:

and they shall not sanctify the people with their garments; the garments of the priesthood were reckoned holy, whatsoever was holy, that which it touched accounted holy also; and therefore, to preserve a difference between the priests and the common people, they were not to wear their holy garments but in the time of service; or lest any superstitious notion should obtain among the people, that they were sanctified by touching their clothes; as the Papists give out, that if a man is buried in a monk's cowl, he shall be saved: or the sense is, that they should not possess the minds of the people with a notion of any real sanctity in their garments; or that their conversation garments, or good works, can be of any service to them: this may be opposed to works of supererogation.

Ver. 20. *Neither shall they shave their heads, &c.*] As the priests and worshippers of Isis and Serapis did, as Jerom on the text observes; and as the Romish priests now do, from whom the Lord's faithful ministers must be distinguished:

nor suffer their locks to grow long; as the Nazarites, that a distinction might be preserved between those who were and were not such; or rather, after the manner of women, their locks hanging down, and flowing about their shoulders, as a token of levity, wantonness, effeminacy, pride, and vanity; (see ^{<46114>}1 Corinthians 11:14,15):

they shall only poll their heads; observe a medium between both; neither shave their heads close, nor let their hair grow long, but keep it in an even moderate length; for which reason godly men of the last age among us were called “round heads”.

Ver. 21. *Neither shall any priest drink wine*, &c.] That is, to excess, immoderately, so as to be inebriated with it, (^{<46100>}Leviticus 10:9-11), should not be given to it, and greedy of it, and drink it so as to disguise themselves: this is reckoned among the qualifications of a Gospel minister, (^{<54113>}1 Timothy 3:3), otherwise it is not forbidden good men, or ministers of the word, to drink wine, for health’s sake, and for the refreshment of nature, provided it is done in moderation, (^{<54123>}1 Timothy 5:23), and particularly care should be taken that they drink it in such a manner,

when they enter into the inner court: to attend divine service, since immoderate drinking affects the memory; and such may forget the law and doctrines of the Lord they are to deliver or hear; and may put them upon saying and doing that which is improper and indecent: drunkenness in any Christian professor is abominable, especially in a minister of the word; and when it appears in his ministration, it is scandalous to the last degree.

Ver. 22. *Neither shall they take for their wives a widow*, &c.] Who has been not only another man’s, but at her own will, and done her own pleasure, and been her own mistress, and so not easily brought into subjection, and to behave as becoming her station:

or her that is put away; or, “thrust forth”^{f780}; out of doors; whose husband has given her a bill of divorce; since she may be suspected of having done some ill thing:

but they shall take maidens of the seed of the house of Israel; virgins, and not of the families of unconverted persons, who have been brought up in an irreligious way, but of godly families, and who have had a religious education:

or a widow that had a priest before: and so used to religious exercises, and to the manner of living of such persons. All good men should be careful whom they marry, and especially ministers of the Gospel; who are here supposed and allowed to marry, contrary to the church of Rome, which forbids her priests to marry. It is observed by some, and with great propriety, that in the latter days antichristian churches will be disowned; and that godly faithful ministers will become pastors, and take the care of such churches, who are like a chaste virgin espoused to Christ, and such who have had faithful pastors over them before. This seems to refer to the law concerning the marriage of the high priest, (⁽⁴²¹¹³⁾Leviticus 21:13,14), and what is there enjoined him is here enjoined all the priests of the Lord; and therefore, as Kimchi rightly observes, this is a new rule respecting future times.

Ver. 23. *And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane,* &c.] Persons and things; not in a ceremonial, nor merely in a moral, but in an evangelical sense, between truth and error; between the doctrine which is according to godliness, and that which is corrupt and unsound, and eats as cloth a canker; between holy worship, and superstition; between holy duties, and profane and Heathen rites and ceremonies; and between persons sanctified by the Spirit and grace of God, and unconverted ones:

and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean; impure persons, doctrines, and manners, and those which are agreeable to the word of God; the sense is, that they shall take pains to instruct persons in the knowledge of divine things, and shall do it truly, faithfully, and sincerely.

Ver. 24. *And in controversy they shall stand in judgment,* &c.] When any controversy arises among the saints concerning civil things, this shall not be carried into a court of judicature, of the men of the world; but it shall be brought before the church, and there heard, tried, judged, and determined; the ministers of the word there presiding, who shall give the definitive sentence, and stand to it, and abide by it, (⁽⁴¹⁰⁾1 Corinthians 6:1-7) and when any controversy arises about the doctrines of the Gospel, or modes of worship, or rules of discipline, they shall rise up, discuss the point, determine the question, pass the sentence, and not depart from it:

and they shall judge it according to my judgments; not according to their own judgments, or according to their own fancies, or the reasonings of

their own minds, but according to those directions and rules given in the word of God; which is profitable for the settling and establishing true doctrine, and the reproof and correction of error, and for the instruction of men in the paths of righteousness:

and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; which assemblies are the churches of Christ, gathered according to Gospel order; where the saints assemble together for divine worship, and where the Lord grants his presence; and where his word is preached, and his ordinances administered, and so called his; and of which assemblies Gospel ministers are the masters, and where they preside; and whose business is to observe the laws and statutes the Lord has made, and to interpret them unto the people, and enforce them on them, and see that they are kept by them:

and they shall hallow my sabbaths; such times as are appointed for divine worship; these they shall keep holy themselves, in the exercise both of private and public worship, and shall exhort and stir up all with whom they are concerned to do the same.

Ver. 25. *And they shall come at no dead person to defile themselves,* &c.] Shall not come into places where they are, nor touch them, nor attend their funerals, (^{<B201>}Leviticus 21:1,11), that their work might not be interrupted, or they through grief and sorrow be made unfit for it, (^{<A182>}Matthew 8:22), this, in a spiritual sense, may signify, that they should have no conversation or fellowship with men dead in trespasses and sins; and should abstain from all dead works, as all sinful ones are:

but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister that hath had no husband, they may defile themselves; by coming near them, touching them, at least attending their funerals, because of their near relation to them, and that natural sympathy and affection that must be in them: all sorrow and mourning for dead relations is not forbidden saints, nor ministers of the word; provided it is in moderation, and not to excess, and is not for gracious persons, as those without hope; and should as little as possible break in upon the duties of their office, (^{<D413>}1 Thessalonians 4:13 ^{<B113>}John 11:33,35).

Ver. 26. *And after he is cleansed,* &c.] From any sin or iniquity, failing and imperfection, that he has been guilty of at such seasons, in mourning for the dead, by a fresh application of the blood of Christ, which cleanses from all sin; typified by the water of separation, made of the ashes of the

red heifer, by which those who were in this way ceremoniously unclean were cleansed, (⁸⁹¹³Hebrews 9:13,14):

they shall reckon unto him seven days; that is, seven days shall be reckoned from the time of his cleansing, before he enters on public service again: according to the old law, seven days were reckoned from the defilement to the purification; here seven more are numbered after the purification is made; and therefore, as Kimchi truly notes, this is a new law or rule, to be observed in after times.

Ver. 27. *And in the day that he goeth into the sanctuary*, &c.] Into the house and church of God, after his cleansing, and when the seven days from thence are up:

unto the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary; among the inward court worshippers, to minister in things to them; to preach the Gospel, and administer Gospel ordinances:

he shall offer his sin offering, saith the Lord God; though he has been privately cleansed in the fountain of Christ's blood, in which he has washed for sin and uncleanness; yet when he comes into the house of the Lord, he must acknowledge his sins and imperfections over Christ the sin offering; which he must bring in the arms of his faith, and so enter into the courts of the living God, and do the service of the sanctuary.

Ver. 28. *And it shall be unto them for an inheritance*, &c.] Either the sin offering, or the priesthood, and the perquisites belonging to it: or,

they shall have an inheritance^{f781}; but what shall it be? God himself:

I am their inheritance; the Lord is the portion and inheritance of his people, who are made priests unto him, whether in a private or public capacity; they are heirs of God, he is their portion in the land of the living, and forever: God in all his perfections is theirs; and though incommunicable, they have the use and advantage of them, so far as they are capable and stand in need of them; as his eternity, immutability, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, grace, mercy, goodness, truth, and faithfulness: he is theirs in all his persons; God the Father is their covenant God and Father; the Son of God is their Head and Husband, their Saviour and Redeemer, Mediator and Peacemaker, their Prophet, Priest, and King; his blood, righteousness, sacrifice, and faithfulness, theirs, and even all that he is and has: the Spirit of God is their convincer and

enlightener, their quickener and sanctifier; their Comforter, and the Spirit of adoption to them, the seal and earnest of their future glory; and God under every character is theirs, as the God of nature and providence, and as the God of all grace; and this is an inheritance rich and large, a soul satisfying portion, an inconceivable and an inexhaustible one.

And ye shall give them no possession in Israel; so the priests and Levites had none under the law, but were provided for in another way, (^{<408D>}Numbers 18:20,21 ^{<4180E>}Deuteronomy 18:1,2 ^{<61314>}Joshua 13:14), the Lord's people and priests, under the Gospel dispensation, for the most part are the poor of this world, who have no share in the possessions of it; their good things are not here, but in the world to come, and in God himself: "I am their possession"; the Lord is enjoyed by them now; his love is shed abroad in their hearts; they have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and communion with the Holy Ghost; and which is infinitely better than all the possessions of this world; and besides, provision is made for their outward maintenance, as follows:

Ver. 29. *They shall eat the meat offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering, &c.]* Which were typical of Christ; the meat offering, or rather bread offering, it being made of fine flour, was a type of Christ the bread of life; and the sin and trespass offerings pointed at his being made sin and a sacrifice for it; which the people and priests of the Lord in a spiritual sense eat, feed, and live upon by faith: and besides, as the priests under the law had a part in all these offerings, whereby they and their families were maintained, (^{<408B>}Leviticus 2:3 6:29 7:6), so it is the will and ordination of Christ, that as those that ministered about holy things, and waited at the altar, should live of them, and partake with that, so they that preach the Gospel should live by it, (^{<4013>}1 Corinthians 9:13,14):

and every dedicated thing in Israel shall be theirs; or, "every devoted thing"¹⁷⁸²; that is, to holy uses, what the people willingly offer to support the interest of religion; signifying that the ministers of the word shall live upon the free contributions of the people.

Ver. 30. *And the first of all the first fruits of all things, and every oblation, of all of every sort of your oblations shall be the priests, &c.]* Suggesting, that their offerings or contributions, which should be made out of their substance, should be in proportion to it, and early as well as free; (see ^{<408B>}Proverbs 3:9):

ye shall also give unto the priest of your dough; either of the first they made of the new corn of the year, or a piece or cake of whatsoever at any time they made; signifying, that the ministers of the word, that communicate spiritual things to men, should partake of their carnal ones, and have a part and share with them in all good things, in all the enjoyments of life, (^{<4011>}1 Corinthians 9:11 ^{<4066>}Galatians 6:6):

that he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house; that is, that he, the priest or minister of the word, that partakes of the above things, and is comfortably provided for and supported, may pray to the Lord for such who liberally contribute to him; that a blessing may come and abide upon them and their families, and prosperity and success may attend them in their worldly business and employments of life; as well as they and theirs may be blessed with all spiritual blessings, with grace here, and glory hereafter.

Ver. 31. *The priests shall not eat of anything that is dead of itself, or torn, &c.]* They shall have no need to eat of such things, being plentifully provided for with better; nor will it become them so to do through avarice, not allowing themselves to enjoy what is liberally given them. Here the Jewish doctors^{f783} observe that it is said, the priests shall not eat of these things, suggesting that Israelites might; this puzzles them, therefore they say, Elijah will explain this verse; and the gloss says, till Elijah comes, and explains it to us, we know not how to explain it. In the mystic sense it may signify, that the priests of the Lord should have no communication with such as are dead in sin, or are given to rapine and violence, and should abstain from everything of this kind themselves.

Whether it be fowl or beast; whether Pharisees and high flown professors of religion, or earthly and worldly persons, and such that are immersed in carnal pleasures, in sensual and brutish lusts. The allusion is to the law in (^{<0175>}Leviticus 17:15), which was common to all Israelites, priests and people.